

Media Release

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From the left, Bill Johnson of the DSB Board presents Robert Fagan of Little Rock with an award for being selected as the state Consumer of the Year by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind. Fagan's employer, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind, was recognized as the state's outstanding business partner for its commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment.

Little Rock man who's blind earns state achievement award

Robert Fagan of Little Rock, who's been legally blind since birth, has been named the state's outstanding Consumer of the Year by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB).

The DSB Board selected him for the achievement award because of his determination to overcome adversity and succeed at work. Fagan worked for 17 years as a dorm parent with Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ASBVI). After retiring from ASBVI, he now

works as a machinist at Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind and is the chairman of the safety committee. He's been employed there six years.

Fagan is family-oriented and community-minded. In 2010, he was appointed by then Governor Mike Beebe to the Arkansas Independent Living Council, and he was re-appointed this year by Governor Asa Hutchinson. He became vice-chair of the Council midway through his first term.

"The best job I have is being a husband to my wife Sherrie and a father to my son Cameron. That's my number one job," Fagan said. His son is a sophomore in high school. The Fagans have served for four

years as foster parents to Arkansas children who are blind or visually impaired. They also hosted a young woman from Turkey while she was a senior at ASBVI.

Prior to his selection for the state award, Fagan was one of only 13 people in Arkansas who received area awards. Other area award winners were Jennifer Mendenhall of White Hall, Pine Bluff Jefferson County Economic Opportunities Commission Inc. Head Start; Marissa Hernandez of Van Buren, Valley Behavioral Health; Renee Meeler of Batesville, DHS Division of County Operations Access Arkansas Processing Center; Emily Buckingham of Fayetteville, JB Hunt Transportation; Melissa Moffitt of Little Rock, Waffle House; Joseph Moss of Marion, Alliance Inspection Management; Joe Sexson of Royal, owner of Dream Mtn. Kennel; Kevin Estes of Harrison, Arkansas State Police Crimes Against Children Division; David Gothard of Chidester, Aerojet Rocketdyne; Rufus Hardin of North Little Rock, Arkansas Department of Education Division of Research and Technology and Best Buy Mobile; and Natasha Friar of Newport and Mary Hicks of De Queen, who are both self-employed cosmetologists.

The state award presentation was made December 11, after the DSB Board meeting at a reception honoring the nominees and their employers. Fagan's employer, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind, was recognized as the state's outstanding business partner for its commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment.

Fagan said he was born with cataracts in both eyes and had surgery before he was a year old. "In 1969 there was no laser treatment, so I had scalpel surgery, which worked, but left a lot of scar tissue. I could ride a bike and do other things. I had several retina detachments because of the scar tissue." He developed glaucoma, which slowly began taking his remaining vision. Fortunately, he said he'd learned Braille and how to use JAWS computer software (for synthesized speech) while at ASBVI.

Fagan is the vice president of the Arkansas School for the Blind Alumni Association and is a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Arkansas. Fagan completed three years of college, planning to major in Sociology. He and his wife are members of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock.

This is the eighth year that DSB has given Consumer of the Year awards to recognize individuals who have managed their rehabilitation plans, gained marketable skills, secured good jobs, and become role models for others.

DSB provides vocational rehabilitation services to adults who are blind or severely visually impaired and whose goal is successful employment. The division also serves youth and older blind individuals. For information about DSB's programs and services, visit the DSB website at <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dsb/Pages/default.aspx> or call 1-800-960-9270, 501-682-5463, or TDD 501-682-0093.